

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY



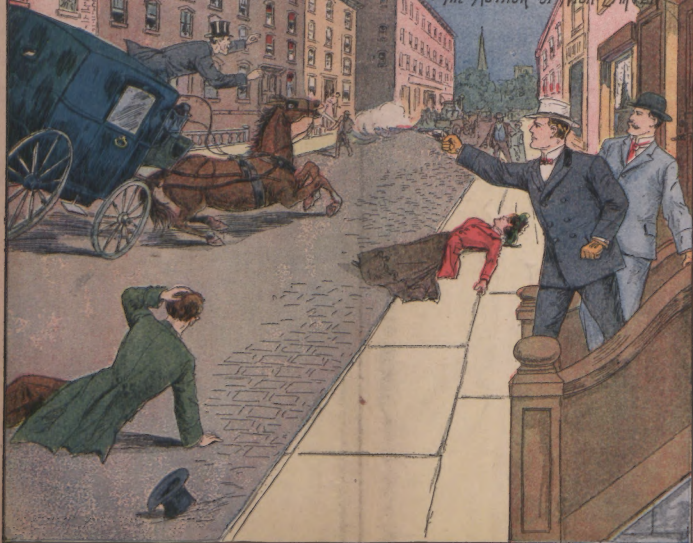
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No. 421.

Price, Five Cents.

ZANONI, THE TRANSFIGURED OR NICK CARTER'S PHANTOM MASCOT

by THE AUTHOR OF 'NICK CARTER'



Nick Carter leaped down the steps and fired. The horse, shot through the brain, pitched forward, and the cab was precipitated over its body.



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NEW YORK, January 21, 1905.

Price Five Cents.

ZANONI, THE TRANSFIGURED;

OR,

Nick Carter's Phantom Mascot.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

READERS of this weekly will find that beginning this week the stories have been increased over one-third in length. This increase is made in response to a general demand that the weekly be issued more frequently than once a week. To do that is impossible, but we have increased the length to show our appreciation of the favor with which these stories have been received. You will find that there is no drop in the quality with the increase. From this on, these stories will be the longest as well as the best of their kind published.

CHAPTER I.

THE MURDER OF MADAME YAGAROSI.

A crowd had gathered in front of the main entrance of the "Sushehima"—one of the new modern apartment houses in the busy section of uptown New York and not far removed from Long Acre Square.

Two policemen were standing guard over the door and

were systematically refusing admittance to every applicant alike, without fear or favor.

As the name of the apartment house would indicate, it was a resort for the better class of the Japanese contingent of New York City, and the place was owned, and, in fact, operated by a prominent member of that colony.

The occasion of the excitement was a very common one—a murder.

The victim, a young and beautiful woman, had been discovered at two o'clock in the afternoon, seated in one of the comfortable chairs of the reception parlor, dead; and the cause of death was apparent upon the instant she was found.

A dagger, long, slender and evidently of oriental manufacture, had been driven through her spine just below the nape of the neck.

When discovered, she was seated in the chair near

the window, and her attitude denoted that she had been engaged in listlessly gazing through the curtains into the street when the fatal blow was struck.

Her chin was upon her right hand. Her elbow rested on the upholstered arm of the chair. Her body was thrown forward in such a position that it sustained itself, and that, moreover, in a pose which was so natural and graceful that it was impossible to determine from the appearance of things, the length of time that had elapsed since the commission of the crime.

The body was quite chilled when discovered. Rigor mortis had established itself, showing, indubitably, that several hours must have elapsed since the blow was struck and before the victim of that blow was discovered.

Men and women, and many of them, must have passed in and out of that reception parlor; confidences must have been exchanged; secrets must have been told; plans must have been entered into or departed from—in fact, all the what-not of the social and business world must have passed in review before those dead eyes between the time when the murderer committed the deed, and the moment when a frightened bell boy, searching for the owner of them with a card in his hand, had recognized her, and found her—dead.

And the card, which the bell boy had sought to deliver, bore the name of Nicholas Carter.

The frightened bell boy, as soon as he was aware of the terrible thing that had happened, had flown, not to the hotel officials, but to the detective himself, who was waiting in the office of the hotel for the boy's return; and his announcement, made in a hoarse whisper but with only too evident excitement, was:

"She is there, sir, in the parlor; but she is dead."

The hotel clerk heard the announcement. Several people standing near heard it. The information somehow communicated itself like magic to every person within the radius of immediate sound and sight, and it was only the quick and energetic action of the detective which prevented a veritable mob from penetrating to the parlors at once.

He sprang instantly to the wide doors which communicated with the spacious salon, and facing about, confronted those who would have forced their way inside.

"I call upon you, gentlemen, to assist me in seeing to it that no person enters this room before the arrival of the coroner, and that no person who is now inside is permitted to leave it without official permission," he said, as he faced them; and upon the instant it seemed as if every person there—or, at least, every man there, suddenly resolved himself into a special officer for the purpose of carrying out the wishes of the detective.

But, nevertheless, the news of the catastrophe had flown apace, as such news always will do.

It wormed its way through the doors into the street. It flew from doorman to cabman, and from cabby to others until it seemed as if the whole world had been informed of the crime and had presented itself at the doors of the Sushehima for admittance.

Yet, nobody was permitted to enter that parlor—and not one of the five persons who were inside when the murder was discovered, was permitted to leave it.

It is doubtful if the ordinary citizen understands the seriousness of a murder, viewed from the standpoint of officialdom. With official life, it was a mere matter of machinery.

It is like an equation in algebra.

A, equals the body discovered. B, is the weapon with which the crime was committed. Y, includes the surrounding circumstances. X, is naturally the unknown quantity—hence, the person or persons who committed the crime; and the officers of the law, while they are not presumably familiar with algebra, still regard the incident merely as a matter of course, and unite their energies to solve the riddle of the letter X.

But the crowd which surged outside the doors of the building was kept at bay. Nick Carter, having taken immediate command of the situation and, having summoned the proprietor of the hotel to his assistance, compelled compliance with his directions in such a manner that not even a reporter of a newspaper was admitted to the scene of the murder until it had been satisfactorily established that none of the five persons in the parlor had been, at the time of the discovery, cognizant of the fact that the sixth member of their group was a corpse, and until the coroner had given an undertaker directions to remove the body.

Then, when the black wagon drove away with the remains, and when the curious ones who had gathered outside were satisfied that no further information could be gained, the reporters were admitted, and were permitted to obtain such details as they could of the most remarkable daylight crime in the annals of the history of New York.

But, in the meantime, Nick Carter, with Inspector McClusky and the coroner, had thoroughly investigated every detail connected with the tragedy. They had probed every possible source of information. They had searched every channel of information obtainable; and directions had been given to the clerk and to others connected with the hotel, precisely regarding the character of their replies when they were questioned concerning the unfortunate circumstance.

A feature of this course of questioning and of the replies given, is of interest in the case as demonstrating the general view taken of it by the public, built, of course, upon the reports which were printed in the papers—the extras gotten out that same afternoon, and the supposed

more detailed accounts published in the morning editions of the following day.

"Are you willing to give me any information about the crime which is reported to have occurred here to-day?" asked one newspaper representative of the clerk, when he had resumed his place and his placid smile, at the hotel desk.

"Very little," replied the clerk. "The fact is, we know no more about it than you do, and the entire matter is now in the hands of the police."

"What was the name of the woman who was killed?"

"She was known here as Madame Yagarosi."

"Was she a Japanese?"

"Her husband is a general in the Japanese army. She was, herself, an American, I think."

"She was a guest here?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"Between two and three months."

"Was she attended, or was she alone?"

"She had two Japanese maids, and a courier—an officer in the Japanese army. They are still here, but they cannot be interviewed."

"We have been told that the detective, Nick Carter, discovered the body; is that true?"

"The body was discovered by one of the hall boys of the hotel, who was attempting to deliver Mr. Carter's card at the time. If you should apply to that gentleman he will no doubt answer your questions in detail. I have no further information to give."

"Is there any suspicion concerning the probable murderer?"

"None whatever."

"Or any idea as to the probable motive of the crime?"

"None that I am permitted to state."

"Where is the body, now?"

"At Jackson's undertaking establishment on Seventh Avenue; but you will not be permitted to see it before to-morrow. It is in charge of the police."

"I have been told that she was young, beautiful and very rich."

"She was young—not more than twenty, I should say. She was, without exception, the most beautiful woman I ever saw, and as she occupied the most expensive suit of apartments in this house and maintained three servants to wait upon her, it follows that she was not in need of funds."

"You say she was an American; now——"

"I said I thought she was an American. I do not know."

"Can I see the suit of apartments she occupied here?"

"Unfortunately, that suit has been sealed and nobody

is permitted to enter. That was at the request of Mr. Carter, and with the hearty permission of the proprietor."

"Was Madame Yagarosi known to the proprietor of the hotel before she came here?"

"I have not asked him that question, and, therefore, I cannot answer it."

"Was she known to you before she came here?"

"Certainly not."

"Has her husband ever stopped here?"

"I have no information on that point."

"Do you think she was killed because of any affair of—er—the heart? Of any love affair?"

"I have not permitted myself to think upon that subject at all, sir. Madame Yagarosi is dead. She was murdered. She was stabbed through the spine while she was seated in a chair in the reception parlor of this hotel. She was an honored guest in this house, beloved by all; and now mourned by all; that is all I can say. But if you will return here at ten o'clock this evening, Mr. Carter has announced that he will be in the parlor at that time, prepared to give out all the information which the police will permit to be known at the present time. He has entire charge of the case."

CHAPTER II.

AN EXPATRIATED RUSSIAN PRINCESS.

At ten o'clock that evening, Nick Carter was present in the parlor of the hotel prepared to meet the newspaper representatives who cared to interview him.

There were many, of course, who had preferred to go their own several ways in the quest for information; but there were others who realized that Nick Carter was the true source of intelligence in this particular case, and that he would give out to them as much authentic knowledge as he deemed wise at that moment.

"Gentlemen," he said to them, when they were assembled, "this is to be in no sense an interview. I shall tell you all about the case that can be told at the present time. If any of you have sources of information which exceeds what I shall afford you, I will be glad if you will come to me with any knowledge you may obtain before you go to the length of publishing."

"Madame Yagarosi was, in her private life, and before she became the wife of a Japanese general, a Russian. In her own country she bore the title of a princess, but you are aware, doubtless, that in Russia the titles of prince and princess does not necessarily imply that the possessors of them are of royal blood."

"It has been always, I believe, an unwritten law that when a woman marries, she forsakes her antecedents, her parents and her country and cleaves only to her husband."

"Madame Yagarosi evidently held to this idea, for when

she became the wife of an officer in the Japanese army—and that happened before the beginning of the present war—she became in effect a Japanese herself, forsaking forever, it would appear, her allegiance to all things Russian, and adopting only the principles of her husband, whom she had chosen from among many, for better or for worse.

"I may say here that Gen. Yagarosi is known to me personally. I have been his guest in Japan. I know him to be a man of sterling qualities—a man, in short, for whom you would all feel admiration and esteem did you know him as I know him.

"I will add, for the sake of general information on the subject, that he made the acquaintance of his wife while he was attached to the Japanese legation in St. Petersburg; that their attachment was a case of love at first sight; and that during the two years since they were married, there has never been even the suggestion of a cloud upon their marital union.

"You have been told that when the body of the unfortunate woman was discovered, a servant of this hotel was attempting to deliver my card to Madame Yagarosi. You are naturally curious on this point, so I will add that I received, this morning, a letter from the general in which he requested me to call upon his wife at this hotel, and in which he stated that he had written her at the same time, stating that I would call. It is, therefore, more than likely that at the moment she was stricken down, she was waiting in the reception parlor for my coming, for I had sent a note by a messenger stating that I would call.

"The investigations already made by the inspector, by the coroner, and by myself, have resulted in nothing more definite than the bare facts announce; that is, that the murder was committed by a person unknown to us.

"Madame Yagarosi is dead. Her body will be embalmed according to the best known process, and will be held in a proper depository to await instructions from her husband, who is now at the front in Manchuria with Marshal Oyayama.

"Now, gentlemen, if there are any questions you would like to ask, I am at your service, but with the reservation that I must decline to give out information on such points as may seem to me, at the present time, to be incompatible with my public duty."

"Will you tell us the maiden name of the princess?" asked one of the newspaper men.

"For reasons which no doubt you will comprehend, I must decline to do that at present," replied the detective.

"Do you have reason to suppose that the murder is the result of politics, as represented between Japan and Russia?"

"My impression is that Madame Yagarosi would not

have been killed had she not been a Russian subject, according to the laws of Russia, and even in that case, if she had still not been the wife of a Japanese army officer."

"So you admit, in effect, that the murder is due to diplomatic intrigue; or, rather, that it was not due to personal matters."

"I leave you to draw your own inferences from what I have already said."

"Then it would follow, would it not, that Madame Yagarosi was killed by a Russian, or by an emissary of the Russians?"

"That is as you take it—as you please to understand it. I am not disposed to give you the benefit of my conjectures on the case."

"Will you tell us why you were calling upon her at that special time?"

"I have already told you—at the request of her husband."

"But why did he make the request?"

"His letter stated that she would inform me on that point at our interview. You are aware that no interview took place, and hence you cannot expect me to reply to that question."

"But you knew, did you not?"

"That, gentlemen, I must leave to your own inference."

"Have you any theory concerning the crime itself, Mr. Carter?"

"I have several; but inasmuch as thus far not one of them has developed beyond the realm of theory, you would not care for them."

"Do you think you will be able to find the murderer?"

"I have not a doubt of it."

"And where will you look for him?"

"You should have included both pronouns in that question. I have not said whether I supposed the murderer to be described by 'him' or 'her.'"

"Then will you tell us where you will look for him or her, whichever the case may be?"

"I shall confine my researches, for the present, to the city of New York," replied the detective, with a smile.

"Among the guests or the employees of this hotel?"

"Hardly that; or, if it were that, you should know that I would not admit it."

"Do you suppose that this crime might be the outcome of a conspiracy in which the government of Russia is concerned?"

"Conspiracies are always possible; but it is hardly supposable that a great country like Russia would descend to making war upon a defenseless woman."

"The history of Russia shows that she has made war upon many defenseless women."

"Very good. That is your inference—only you must not charge me with suggesting it."

"Was there any robbery connected with this crime? Had the body of the victim been despoiled in any way, or had the suit of apartments been entered?"

"I think," replied the detective, slowly, "that while declining to enter into explanations I may answer yes to both questions."

"Were any of her jewels missing? Had money been stolen?"

"No."

"Papers?"

"Certain documents known to have been in her possession immediately before the murder have not been found since that time."

"Political documents?"

"My impression is that they were of a private character."

"Mr. Carter, you have told us that we might ask almost any questions we wished, but that you reserved the privilege of replying or not as you saw fit. Will you tell us if you have ever had an interview with Madame Yagarosi since she came to this city?"

"You may say that I have had two interviews with her."

"Then you were not unknown to each other?"

"Certainly not."

"And when you sent her word that you were about to call upon her at the request of her husband, she knew perfectly well whom to expect?"

"Perfectly well."

"Is it your opinion that she was stabbed by a man, or by a woman?"

"The delicacy of the deed would suggest that it was done by a woman. I can say no more than that."

"Mr. Carter, was it politics, or a private affair which resulted in the death of Madame Yagarosi?"

"It certainly was not the result of a private affair in the manner in which you put the question; and I cannot assert that politics had anything to do with the matter."

"But the fact remains that she was an expatriated Russian, married to a Japanese army officer at a time when the two countries in question are at war."

"That fact remains—yes."

"And we are to draw our own conclusions from that statement."

"I have had to draw mine; you are certainly entitled to the same privilege."

"You will not state who Madame Yagarosi was before she became the wife of a Japanese general?"

"No; I do not regard it as a wise thing to do at this moment."

"But she was a Russian princess?"

"She was a Russian princess."

"Rich?"

"Quite so."

"Is her husband also a rich man?"

"Comparatively speaking, yes."

"Do you know if it was the intention of Madame Yagarosi to remain in this country for any length of time?"

"I have reason to believe that it was her intention to remain here until the end of the war between Russia and Japan."

"Then she was simply awaiting her husband."

"That would apparently explain the situation."

"And, in the meantime, she had been placed in a measure, in your care; is that it?"

"Abstractly, yes."

"And she was murdered at the very hour when you were on your way to her, to protect her from a threatening danger?"

"Your guess is approximately correct, sir."

CHAPTER III.

THE CARD WITH THE WARNING.

We have seen the case now from the standpoint of the public.

We know all that the general citizen was permitted to learn from the newspaper reports, which appeared from time to time during the two or three days when the commission of the crime occupied the prominent place among the heads in the different journals; and now we must return for a moment to the time of the discovery of the crime and to the arrival—first of the coroner, and second of the inspector, upon the scene.

Nick Carter had taken his place as guard at the door of the reception parlor.

He had requested all alike to assist him in seeing to it that nobody was permitted to enter or to leave the parlor until the arrival of the coroner; and without going near the body of the murdered woman—without, in fact, moving from the position he had taken at the parlor door, he waited there for the arrival of the two officials.

Inspector McCluskey came first, and with him a contingent from the station house of that particular police precinct; and Nick was glad to relinquish to them the authority which he had maintained up to that moment.

It was only then that he stepped into the parlor, and without a glance at the five badly frightened people, who were grouped in one corner of the room awaiting permission to leave it, crossed to the window near where the body had been found, and stood there looking down upon the dead woman, now so cold in death, and yet still so lifelike in pose.

"Too late," he thought, under his breath. "An hour too late; two hours too late—what does it all matter to you now?"

He did not touch the body. He did not go nearer to

it than to bend over it one or more times while his eyes were busy taking in every detail of the surroundings.

He noticed first where the short hilt of the strange dagger protruded from a point just below the back of her neck, and he wondered how it was that people could have passed and repassed that spot, time after time, with never a glance at that deadly significant thing.

He saw how perfectly she was posed—just as if she had arranged herself for the sacrifice so that after the blow was struck, no observer would be the wiser from her attitude.

The chair itself, like a Mexican saddle, was capable of supporting a body in almost any position it might assume, indefinitely.

The thick, heavy cushions, upholstered in leather, clung about her figure almost like an embrace, refusing to permit it to slip from its folds when the power of self-support was gone.

And she was leaning forward with her chin upon her hand and her right elbow resting upon the arm of the chair. Her right shoulder was against the cushions; her left foot pressed against a hassock, thus refusing to permit the body to slide out of its position; her left arm, with the hand of it gloved and holding a dainty kerchief, rested across her lap.

Nick spent only a moment in contemplation of the body; then he crossed to the five frightened people who were waiting to be released from the parlor—and of those five, four were women.

"I am very sorry to have been compelled to put you to this inconvenience," he said, addressing them collectively, "and I wish at once to reassure you. As soon as the coroner arrives, and you have given your names, so that at the inquest you can be called upon to tell what little you know, you will be set at liberty."

"But we know nothing—absolutely nothing," replied one of the women. "We have just been discussing it."

"Were the five of you acquaintances before this affair happened?" asked Nick.

"We four ladies were; yes, sir. This gentleman was a stranger, although common woe has made us kin."

"I see," replied Nick, smiling. "Will you tell me which of you five was here first?"

"I was, sir."

"And your name, please?"

"Lucinda Dwelling."

"Are you a guest of the house?"

"No; none of us is a guest of the hotel."

"You were calling here, then? Or expecting to meet friends?"

"Yes; we came together—by appointment. We were to meet Madame Zanoni here, at——"

"Madame—who did you say?" interrupted Nick, startled so that he almost betrayed the fact.

"Madame Zanoni. She is Lady Algernon Travers in real life, but she prefers, in the cult she is now engaged in organizing to be known merely as Madame Zanoni," replied Miss Dwelling, glibly; and she did not notice that the detective had turned away his head and that his hands were clinched tightly together in order to hold himself from betraying the fact that the name was known to him or how it had affected him.

"Madame Zanoni is organizing a new cult, you say?" he asked, somewhat lamely, after a moment.

"Yes; for the inculcation of purity of thought. Ah! sir, she is an angel if ever there was one. So sweet; so pure; so gentle, and with such glorification in her eyes."

"And her real name? Would you mind telling me that again?"

"Lady Algernon Travers."

"Does she live here—at this hotel?"

"Oh, no, indeed; we only meet here."

"Her address—do you know what that is?"

"I am sorry to say that I do not."

"Did she keep the appointment to-day?"

"We do not know. She was to be here at half-past two. We arrived at a little before two, and then this dreadful thing happened. We were locked in as you know—that is, we were prevented from leaving, which is the same thing—and it is now almost three. I do not know if she came or not, but, if she did, it is more than likely that she has gone away again. She may be waiting outside in the corridor for us now."

"True," said Nick. "Excuse me for a moment."

He left them hastily and returned to the corridor, which he traversed from end to end, stopping long enough to gaze into the various reception rooms and parlors; but, presently, he returned to Miss Dwelling.

"It could not be possible," he said to himself, "and yet it is a remarkable coincidence. If it were the name of Zanoni alone! But Lady Algernon Travers! Surely Zanoni has not come to life again out of the depths of the Pacific Ocean to resume her career of murder. I cannot believe that. It is not possible;" and then he rejoined Miss Dwelling.

"You stated that you had been here the longest, I believe?" he said to her.

"Yes."

"What time did you enter the parlor?"

"At half-past one."

"Who was here when you came in?"

"Quite a number of people; I did not know any of them?"

"But there are none here now who were here then?"

"None save that one over there;" and she indicated with a gesture, the corpse of Madame Yagarosi.

"She was here then?"

"Yes."

"In the same attitude she now occupies?"

"Precisely."

"Do you think she was dead at that time?"

"I am quite sure that she has not moved since that time."

"Did you see any person approach her?"

"No, sir."

"Have you seen Madame Zanoni at all since you arrived?"

"No; not at all."

"You would, of course, have seen her, had she entered this room while you were here?"

"Certainly."

"Are these other ladies students of the cult introduced by Madame Zanoni?"

"Yes, indeed."

"And this gentleman?"

"He will have to answer for himself. We have never met before. Our common trouble of—"

"Yes; I understand."

"I am a guest of the hotel, sir; a foreigner. My name is Hermann von Bulow," the man interpolated. "I arrived only last night. When I entered the parlor to-day, these four ladies were seated together here. We had not exchanged a word until we were ordered not to leave the room without permission. I am an officer in the German army. May I present my card?"

He produced a silver card case and with considerable flourish extracted a card which he presented to the detective.

"May I inquire if you were also in expectation of meeting this Madame Zanoni?" asked Nick.

"I can assure you, sir, that I never heard the name mentioned until it was uttered by these ladies, and that I never heard of the lady at all."

"A question, which may seem impertinent, occurs to me now, sir," continued Nick.

"I shall be happy to be of any service to you in my power," replied the German.

"This hotel is a resort for Japanese; will you tell me how it happens that you selected it among all others when there are so many well-known German resorts in the city?"

"I have spent many years in Japan, and I enjoy their dishes—their cooking," replied the German, glibly.

"You expect to remain here some time?"

"It was my intention to leave to-morrow; but now—"

"Now, I am very much afraid you will have to await

the pleasure of the coroner. Are you willing to do that, on your word of honor as a German officer?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then I think I need not detain you longer at present."

The officer rose in his place, bowed profoundly, and with exceeding dignity moved toward the door; and just as he was passing through it, Nick saw the inspector appear in the opening and nod toward him, while at the same instant a hall boy darted through, and, hastening to Nick, placed a card in his hand.

Upon that card, in feminine chirography, were these words:

"Watch Von Bulow."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERY OF MADAME ZANONI.

Nick Carter pondered over the message for an instant, then rose hastily and went swiftly to the door.

"Inspector," he whispered, "would you mind directing one of your men to keep an eye on that chap who just went out? I will put Chick on the job as soon as I can get him here."

"I read what was on the card," replied the inspector, "and I have already attended to it. Who sent the note to you?"

"That is the question I was about to ask you," retorted the detective.

The very boy who had delivered the message passed along the corridor at that moment, and Nick called to him:

"You are the lad who just delivered the card to me?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Who gave it to you? Where did you receive it?"

"From a lady, sir."

"Where, and when?"

"At the front door of the hotel, sir. I don't know whether she had just come in or was just going out."

"What did she look like? Describe her to me."

"I couldn't do that, because she wore a veil so thick that I could not see her face at all; but she had the sweetest voice I ever heard, I think."

"What did she say to you?"

"I was passing where she was standing when she called to me. 'Mr. Carter is in the parlor,' she said. 'Deliver this card to him as quickly as possible.' That is all I know of the matter, sir. I took the card and she turned away."

"Did she leave the hotel?"

"I don't know. I did not see her again."

"Could you tell me the color of her hair?"

"I think it was dark—very dark, in fact."

"And was she tall or short? Slight of build, or heavy?"
 "Neither the one nor the other. She was just a graceful, pretty woman."

"But you say she was veiled so you could not see her face; how, then, do you know that she was pretty?"

"You don't always have to see a woman's face to tell that she is pretty, sir; at least, that is my belief. There is something about the air around them which tells you that."

"You should have been a poet instead of a hotel hall boy," said the detective; and he turned away and rejoined the inspector.

But he was greatly disturbed by what he had heard in the reception parlor in reference to a certain Madame Zanoni, and even more greatly moved by the receipt of the card with the written words upon it, for in those words he believed he recognized a chirography which was familiar to him.

"Can it be possible," he asked himself, "that Zanoni, the one-time confidant and assistant of the infamous Dr. Quartz, and whom I firmly believe to have ended her life at that island in the far-away Pacific Ocean, is still alive?"

He shook his head in perplexity, and the inspector, perceiving the gesture, asked him what it meant.

"A puzzle," replied Nick.

"The whole thing here seems to be quite a puzzle," said the inspector.

"Yes; but this is an old one which has somehow thrust itself into this affair."

"What is it, Nick?"

"I would rather not tell you that just at present, if you don't mind. I want time to think it over."

"Oh; all right."

"There is no use of injecting unnecessary and extrinsic things into this murder mystery and I want to feel assured that—well, that I have a right to mention it before I do say anything about it."

The coroner arrived at that moment and further questioning on the subject was therefore suspended.

The three officials entered the parlors and the doors were closed. The four ladies, who were still there, were questioned by the coroner, and, having given substantially the same replies with which they had answered Nick, were dismissed, after supplying the coroner with their names and addresses.

As they were about to leave the room, however, Nick intercepted Miss Dwelling.

"Just a question or two more about Madame Zanoni, if you will be so kind," he said to her.

"Certainly," she replied.

"I wish you would give me her address."

"I would gladly do so if I knew it; but I do not."

"How, then, do you communicate with her?"

"Through a messenger boy whom she invariably sends to me, or to the others with whom she desires to communicate."

"She does not permit you to know where she resides?"

"No."

"How did you first make her acquaintance?"

"Through an advertisement in the personal columns of the *Herald*."

"Humph!" said Nick. "Now that you have missed the appointment of to-day, how do you expect again to come in contact with her?"

"I shall have to await her pleasure. When she wishes to see me, she will communicate with me as she has done before."

"You have no doubt that you will hear from her again?"

"None whatever."

"Have you any idea when it will be?"

"Not at all."

"When you do hear from her, and she has appointed a place of meeting, will you inform me of the fact, so that I may also see her?"

"That would be betraying her confidence, and I could not consent to that."

"But you know who I am and what I represent."

"Perfectly well. Still, I must decline. May I ask in turn if you connect her in any way with this terrible affair?"

"God forbid!" said Nick, fervently. "And yet——"

"Well, sir?"

"And yet it was undoubtedly she who sent me the card you saw the boy deliver while I was talking with you."

"Then if she has sent one card to you, and is disposed to assist you in any way, be assured that you will hear from her again."

"Miss Dwelling, will you tell me your impressions of this woman?"

"Gladly. I believe, from what I have seen of her, that she is a woman who has suffered intensely, and who is now endeavoring to atone for something which has happened in her past. I think she seeks to accomplish that end by training young women like myself to think correctly, to live purely, and to do right in all things. She has the sweetest and the most beautiful face I ever saw—but it is a face with a story. I do not know what she may have been in the past, Mr. Carter, but whatever that past may have been, she is a good woman now."

"You will not aid me in meeting her?"

"Not without her permission. I will ask her for that."

"Will you tell her for me that I am possessed with the idea that she is an old acquaintance, and that I greatly desire an interview with her?"

"Yes; I will tell her that."

"You know, Miss Dwelling, it would be an easy matter for me to place a shadow on your daily life, and in that way discover when your next meeting was to take place. In that way I could be present without the consent of either of you. But I do not wish to do that."

"I hope you will assure me that you will not do so, for otherwise I should feel in duty bound to destroy the next note I receive from her, and to send her word of your intention. It would cost me a pang to forego my acquaintance with Madame Zanoni, but I would far prefer to do so than to betray her."

"I will give you that assurance if you in turn will promise to write to me of her decision when you have told her of my wish for an interview."

"I will certainly do that."

"Then we will let it rest in that way. I can see you again after you have heard from her."

"You may see me at any time, if you care to call at my address, which you have."

"Thank you."

"Is there any further message you desire me to pass on to her?"

"No; say merely that I am under the impression that she is an old acquaintance, and that if I am correct, I greatly desire an interview; and also that, in the meantime, I shall not mention her name to any person other than yourself."

"It is my turn to thank you, Mr. Carter, for I am sure she will appreciate that delicacy on your part."

"How many times have you met her, Miss Dwelling?"

"Twice each month for something more than a year."

"And it is now about two years since the time I believe I saw her last," said Nick. "Will you tell her that, also?"

"Certainly."

"You may add, if you will, that Lord Algy also wishes to see her."

"Her husband, Mr. Carter?"

"He was her husband—once."

"I will tell her what you say."

"Thank you again. I will expect to hear from you as soon as may be."

"And you shall."

Then the detective stood and watched Miss Dwelling as she passed from the room, and was himself in a study so deep that the coroner actually touched him on the shoulder to attract his attention to the case of the murder of Madame Yagarosi.

standing close to the window engaged in examining it as Nick Carter turned toward them in response to the summons of the coroner.

The body had been removed to a couch.

"The inspector tells me that you know more about this case than any other person in the hotel at the present time, Mr. Carter," said the coroner.

"I probably know as much about it as any person who was not directly connected with the crime itself," replied Nick.

"You had come here to call upon Madame Yagarosi when the murder was discovered, had you not?"

"I had."

"For what purpose, Mr. Carter?"

"At the request of her husband."

"But for what purpose?"

"To warn her against the very danger which fell upon her before I arrived."

"And her husband had communicated that warning to you?"

"Yes."

"From Japan?"

"Yes."

"But you had seen Madame Yagarosi before, had you not?"

"Yes."

"Also at the request of her husband?"

"No; at her own."

"Then you were not unknown to her?"

"Certainly not. I made her acquaintance at the same time I met her husband—in Japan."

"When?"

"A few months before the beginning of the present war."

"She sent for you because she remembered that acquaintance, I suppose."

"Naturally."

"And also for the purpose of securing your services in guarding her against this danger referred to in the letter from her husband?"

"It was the same in effect if not in fact. She feared assassination."

"Who did she stand in dread of such a thing?"

"Because she had been threatened many times."

"But why? And by whom?"

"The reasons given, and the only one of which she was cognizant, were because she was formerly a Russian princess now married to a Japanese prince, and because her former friends in Russia did not believe that she had done all for a certain cause, she was supposed to represent in that cause, but she might have done."

"What was that cause?"

CHAPTER V.

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN TRULY SLAIN.

The danger with which the murder was committed, had been withdrawn from the wound, and the inspector was

"That is a point upon which I have not sufficient definite knowledge to reply."

"Who had threatened her?"

"I do not know that."

"Did she know?"

"Not more definitely than I do now."

"Did her husband know?"

"Not positively. He had suspicions; but he could never authenticate them."

"Did he communicate those suspicions to you?"

"Partly."

"Will you tell them to me?"

"I think I should prefer to withhold them for the present, if you will withdraw that question. I shall be prepared to tell all I know at the inquest; but I think the inspector will agree with me that this is not the time nor the place for them. I will assure you that they would be of no help to you whatever, at the present time."

"Do you suspect that Madame Yagarosi was murdered by spies of the Russian government?"

"No, sir; I do not."

"By the order of some secret society?"

"That is more likely, although I do not so state."

"Where is Gen. Yagarosi now?"

"At the front, in Manchuria, with Marshal Oyama."

"Do you happen to know where Madame Yagarosi has been during the time that has elapsed since the breaking out of the war?"

"I am not in a position to—"

"I mean, do you know if she has been in Russia during any part of that time?"

"I have reason to believe that she has been."

"Have you examined the weapon with which she was killed?"

"I have looked at the hilt of it, where it protruded from her back. That was all the examination I found necessary."

"Indeed! Why so?"

"Because I recognized it as having been it before."

"But! How we are getting at it!"

"Forthed me; we are further from it than ever."

"How so?"

"Because when I last saw that weapon it was lying on the table in the parlor of Madame Yagarosi's suit; but I had seen it even before that—in her own home, in Japan."

"But does that not suggest that one of her own servants might have committed this deed?"

"It might; but I do not think so. I believe, at all events, that the inspector already has them under surveillance."

"Still, the fact would imply that whoever committed

this crime, went first to the apartments of Madame Yagarosi."

"Undoubtedly."

"Do you think that such a proceeding was made with the intention of murdering her there, or that it was merely for the purpose of securing this weapon, with which to kill her, at any place where she might be found? Here, for instance?"

"I have no ideas on that subject—yet."

"Is there any significance to you in the fact that she was killed with this particular weapon?"

"Yes; there is. But that is associated with the suspicions which I am not now prepared to voice."

"Do you think, Mr. Carter, that you can find the murderer of Madame Yagarosi?"

"I am positive that I can do so; and equally positive that I will do so."

"Good! That is the sort of talk I like to hear. How long a time do you suppose it will require for you to accomplish this?"

"I cannot answer that, for I do not know; but I would like the regular inquest into the affair deferred as long as possible."

"Two weeks?"

"Yes; I think that will suffice."

"And does the inspector concur with you in this opinion?"

"We have not discussed it, but I think he will do so."

"And, in the meantime, as the only representative of Gen. Yagarosi in this country, what do you suggest regarding the disposition of the body?"

"Merely that every requirement of your department be complied with, and that then the body be embalmed and deposited under seal in your care, to await instructions from him. I will request, however, that outside of your own duties and the details connected with it, that no person be permitted to view the body without our joint permission—yours and mine."

"Then I will give directions to have it removed at once to Jackson's; that is, if you have no further investigations to make at present."

"None. I shall be entirely satisfied with your report."

"You have taken no steps yet to discover the murderer?"

"None whatever."

"The hotel employees have not been questioned concerning possible suspicious characters who might have been seen loitering about the corridors, or to have entered this room?"

"No; for the reason that I believe such procedure would be utterly useless."

"Why so?"

"Because this crime was not committed by a suspicious character."

"Do you think it was the act of a guest of the hotel?"

"I think it more than likely; or, if not that, at least by a person who has been seen around here often enough not to fall under the head of a suspicious character."

"You regard it as a crime which was premeditated and carefully planned?"

"I certainly do."

"Have you any suspicions in your own mind at the present time as to who the murderer is?"

"I think you have asked that question already, although in another form, coroner, and I have replied that the time is not at hand to voice such suspicions, even if I have them."

"One more point, Mr. Carter."

"Very well."

"Were the relations between Madame Yagarosi and her husband amicable, as far as you are aware?"

"I think I can assure you that they were entirely so."

"They were not separated, save by distance, then?"

"No, sir. Of that I am positive."

"Have you visited the apartments of madame, since the discovery of the crime?"

"No. The inspector and I thought it best to await you, and to ask you to accompany us. If you are ready, we will go there now."

"Ready! I should say so!"

The coroner turned to the couch whereon the body was lying, and after regarding it for a moment in silence, he said:

"A beautiful woman foully slain. Let us leave no stone unturned, gentlemen, to bring the assassin to justice."

CHAPTER VI.

THE EMPTY CASE—THE MISSING DAGGER.

The suite of rooms occupied by Madame Yagarosi consisted of seven rooms. Three of these were devoted to her servants—the two maids and the courier—and the four remaining consisted of a parlor, library, bedroom, private dining room and bath.

Nick Carter entered the rooms in advance of the others, and as soon as he passed the threshold he turned quickly to the inspector.

"I am confident that we will discover nothing here of interest to us, save among the private papers and affairs of Madame Yagarosi," he said. "Concerning the other details of this case, I have no especial interest, but I wish that you would have her room sealed until such time as we can examine it at our leisure, together."

The inspector nodded, and, returning to the door, gave

a few hurried directions to some person on the outside, after which he returned to his companions.

The rooms were in perfect order.

Everywhere about them was the evidence of occupancy by a woman of taste and refinement.

And there was the delicate scent, also, which pervades always, the habitat of a dainty creature, born to refinement, reared in luxury and cradled in the embrace of plenty.

On every side was evident the recent presence of Madame Yagarosi herself.

One might almost have distinguished her personality in the flowers which drooped from a vase on the mantel, in the embroidery ring resting upon the table, with the needle still pendant from the silk she had been using; in the half-burned cigarette which clung to the edge of a delicate saucer where she had only half finished a cup of coffee; in the partly soiled gloves, cast negligently aside for one of her maids to attend to later on; in the crimson hassock close against the chair near a center table, and the book, open in the middle, but turned face down, as if she had just dropped it because of an interruption; in the dainty slipper tossed carelessly across the room, where the maid had neglected to find it when she had been called upon to adjust her mistress' shoes.

The parlor spoke all too eloquently of its former occupant, now on her way to an undertaking establishment in Seventh Avenue.

The maids and the courier were in attendance; they had been brought in at once at the request of the inspector, so that if any questions were to be asked, they might be there to reply to them.

But neither the inspector nor the detective seemed to have any desire to ask questions.

With the coronor, however, it was different.

He busied himself instantly with every detail his eyes could discover. He picked up the embroidery ring and examined it with great care; and then of one of the maids who stood near to him, he asked:

"When was your mistress busy with this? When did you last see it in her hands?"

"This morning, sir, after she had taken her coffee."

"Did she work long at it?"

"Not longer than usual, sir."

"And how long would that be?"

"Perhaps five minutes; not more."

"What! No more than five minutes on such a delicate and elaborate piece of work as I can see this is intended to be?"

"I have served her since before she was married, sir, and in more than five years she has completed two pieces of the design," replied the maid.

The coroner dropped the embroidery. Next he discovered the gloves.

"When did she wear these?" he asked.

"Yesterday."

"Humph! Who smoked this cigarette?"

"Madame smoked it."

"When?"

"This morning, after her coffee."

"Did madame receive any calls, or cards, this morning?" asked the quiet tones of Nick Carter. "Was there any applicant for her favor this morning?"

"No, sir. Nobody came."

"Who attended her when she dressed to go upon the street?"

"I did."

Nick had picked the gloves up in his hand, and, after raising them to his nostrils, had quietly dropped them upon the table again.

"Did madame ever smoke cigars, as well as cigarettes?" he asked.

"Never, sir."

"And you assert that nobody was here this morning to see her?"

"I—I—yes, sir; at least, that is what she instructed me to say."

"Ah! But, as a matter of fact, there was a person here, was there not? A gentleman?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he was smoking a cigar—or if he was not smoking then, he lighted a cigar just before leaving. You see, Suzanne, he must have stood with his hand resting on the table at the precise spot where these gloves were. Look; here are ashes he dropped from the end of his cigar, and—well, you can easily smell the smoke of a cigar in these gloves. Now, Suzanne, who was that gentleman?"

"Really, sir, I do not know."

"But you remember perfectly well that you saw him here, do you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think you would recognize him if I should describe him to you?"

"I am sure I would."

The vision of the mysterious card which he had received in the parlor had rushed into the detective's mind, and he determined at a hazard to describe Von Bulow. The card had told him to "watch Von Bulow" at a time when it would not have occurred to him to do so; so, now, at a venture, he described the man.

"You are French, are you not, Suzanne?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you recognize a German when you see one?"

"Indeed I do, sir."

"Did not the gentleman who was here look like a German?"

"Yes, sir, I think he did."

"Was he not quite tall? Did he not wear a heavy, blond mustache? Is he not broad and heavily built, and does he not walk across the floor—so?"

Nick turned as he finished the question and walked across the room exactly as Von Bulow had carried himself when he withdrew from the parlor; and when he turned to get a reply to his question, Suzanne was staring at him in amazement.

"That is exactly the way he did it," she exclaimed.

"Who admitted him? Did you?" asked Nick.

"No; madame admitted him herself."

"Indeed! How did that happen?"

"She was seated here when the summons came at the door. I was in the next room. She called to me to continue what I was doing, and said she would go to the door herself. I suppose she thought as I did, that it was one of the servants of the hotel."

"And then——" asked Nick. "Did you happen to hear what occurred at the door?"

"Certainly. I would be a poor servant if I did not watch out to know what happened to my mistress when she went to the door in my place."

"Right. Now, what happened?"

"I heard her exclaim: 'You?' and I heard him reply: 'Hush!' After that I heard nothing."

"But they talked together, did they not?"

"Yes; a long time; an hour or more."

"And did you hear nothing that was said?"

"I heard, but I could not understand."

"They conversed in a language with which you are not familiar; is that it?"

"They talked in Russian, and I never could get to understand it."

"Had you ever seen that gentleman before?"

"Yes, sir; often; although not in a long time. He called frequently upon madame at St. Petersburg."

"Then you know his name, do you not?"

"Yes, sir."

It was plain that Suzanne was giving her evidence with reluctance, but also that she was speaking the truth, and that in evident fear of the consequences which might ensue if she refused to do so.

"What is his name?" asked Nick.

"Count Hermann von Bulow."

"An officer in the German army?"

"An officer in the Russian army, I believe, sir."

"Indeed! Now, Suzanne, why did you not tell me all this at once, and without putting me to the necessity of asking all these questions?"

"I was merely obeying the orders of my mistress, sir."

She directed me not to mention the fact that the count had called, and I did not feel at liberty to do so until your questions convinced me that I was wrong."

"Do you know anything concerning the nature of the business between madame and this Count von Bulow, Suzanne?"

"Nothing whatever, sir."

"Were their relations friendly?"

"Apparently so; but I believe that madame feared him."

"Do you know why? Or do you suspect why she feared him?"

"No, sir."

"Suzanne, do you remember when I called here to see madame?"

"Perfectly."

"Do you remember a curiously wrought dagger, of Eastern make, which was upon this very table at the time I made that call?"

"Yes, sir; I know the weapon very well."

"Do you know where it is now?"

"I suppose it is in madame's room, in a case, where she ordinarily kept it."

"Haven't you seen that dagger to-day?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure that it was not on this table this morning, when Count von Bulow called?"

"I do not think it was. I think I would have noticed it if it had been there. Madame only brought it out on rare occasions."

"What were those occasions? What were her reasons for producing it?"

"I do not know. I think it was connected with some superstition of hers. She told me on one occasion that nothing could harm her when that weapon was beside her. I know that she kept it safely locked in its case in her own sleeping room, save, as I have said, on rare occasions."

"Did she never tell you any particulars about it?"

"Never."

"You know nothing of its history?"

"Nothing."

"And you are of the opinion that it is still locked in its case in her room?"

"That is where it should be."

"Did she ever take it with her when she went out?"

"I have never known her to do so."

"What time did she go out to-day?"

"About eleven o'clock, I think."

"Do you know where she intended to go?"

"No, sir."

"Come with me, now, to her room. I wish to see if the dagger is in its place in the case."

Followed by the detective, the inspector and the cor-

oner, Suzanne led the way to the sleeping room of the princess. The case in which the dagger was usually locked was on the dresser, and it was locked.

A quick wrench at the fastenings broke the clasp, and the lid was raised.

The case was empty. The dagger was not there.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEPHISTOPHELES OF THE CASE.

"Suzanne," said the detective, when the discovery that the dagger was missing from its accustomed place was made, "were you here, in these apartments, all the time that Von Bulow was here?"

"I was in the apartment, but I was not in this room nor in the parlor, save during the first few moments of his call."

"Did you see him when he went away?"

"No, sir."

"Did you know when he did go away?"

"Yes."

"Did you see him go?"

"I did."

"What time was that?"

"About a quarter of an hour before madame herself went out."

"She dressed hastily, then, after his departure; or was she already arrayed for the street?"

"I changed her shoes and brought her a new pair of gloves. She had only to put on her hat, in addition."

"Did she seem to be in haste?"

"Not particularly."

"Was she nervous or frightened, or did she appear to be perturbed in any way by the call she had received?"

"I think she was perplexed. She was frowning, which was unusual; and she said very little to me, which was also not her habit."

"Do you think she left the hotel?"

"I think that was her intention, but I do not know if she actually did so."

"Did you go out also?"

"No; I remained here."

"In which room?"

"In my own room. I had sewing to attend to."

"So you were not again in this part of the suit—until when?"

"Not for two or three hours."

"And the other servants? Where were they during that time?"

"Marie was in the room with me all of the time. Monsieur Jean, the courier, was also in his room, for we frequently exchanged conversation across the hallway."

"So that after madame went out, you are sure that

none of you was in this part of the suit for two or three hours?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, tell me, have you, since you have been stopping at this hotel, observed or recognized any person other than Count von Bulow, whom you remember to have seen before, at any place where you have been staying with madame?"

"Yes, sir; last evening."

"Who was that? Tell me all about it."

"A lady who stopped at the same hotel where we were staying in St. Petersburg."

"An acquaintance of madame's?"

"I think not; I have never seen them converse, or even salute each other."

"An acquaintance of Von Bulow's?"

"I do not think so, but I do not know. I have seen them pass each other in the salon of the hotel in St. Petersburg without speaking."

"Do you know the name of the lady?"

"I have heard her referred to under several names; but that was, of course, servants' gossip. I think her right name is Madame Natalie Luzerne. She is a Russian, I think, although the name is French."

Here the inspector stepped to the outer door of the suit again and whispered to somebody outside, after which he returned as before.

"Did you mention to madame the fact that you had seen Madame Luzerne in the hotel?" asked the detective.

"Certainly, sir."

"She was familiar with the name, then?"

"Quite so."

"What remark did she make when you told her of the presence of Madame Luzerne?"

"None whatever. She merely shrugged her shoulders."

"When did you tell her about the circumstance? Last evening?"

"No; this morning."

"Before Von Bulow called?"

"No; while I was preparing her for the street."

"You loved your mistress, did you not, Suzanne?"

The maid burst into tears at once. She had controlled herself bravely during the ordeal of questioning, but, thus appealed to, she could contain herself no longer.

It was the best answer she could have given to the question, and the detective turned to the inspector while he gave her time to recover herself.

"Inspector," he said, "I know you have already sent detectives to make inquiries concerning this Natalie Luzerne, but I do not think you will get any trace of her, unless it comes through the watch which has already been put upon Von Bulow; but I do think that Suzanne can be of material assistance to us, and I think she will

be quite willing to aid us in every way she can; eh, Suzanne?"

"Indeed, sir, yes."

"I want you to dress yourself as a lady, not as a lady's maid. Dress as if you had come in from the street, or were going out soon, and then, with a book, take your station in one corner of the parlor, where you can observe all who enter or leave it. I will arrange with the management so you will not be disturbed."

"I understand, sir. You wish me to identify this woman, if she appears again, do you not?"

"Yes; or any other man or woman whom you may remember to have seen at any place where you have been staying with your mistress."

"And if I should see her, or any other, what shall I do then, sir?"

"This: Shortly after you have stationed yourself as I have directed, a young man will address you as Mlle. Suzanne, and he will converse with you a few moments. After that he will remain within sight of you. Should you recognize any such person as I have mentioned, you will push your book from your lap to the floor and he will go to you instantly. Then, you have only to indicate the person, and resume your watch as before. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir; but suppose while he is gone after her, another one appears, what shall I do then?"

"Why, then we will have to meet the emergency as best we may, but I think I will have provided a way to cover it. It is not likely that old acquaintances from Russia or Japan will enter the hotel in groups; do you think so?"

"There is another person, sir, whom I have always associated with Count von Bulow, as well as Madame Natalie."

"Indeed! Who is that? A man or a woman?"

"A man—an Austrian, I think. I have never heard his name. He looks like pictures you see of Mephistophiles, only he is quite gray and old. His face is wrinkled and it has the color of parchment. I have not seen him since we have been here, but at every other place where we have stayed I have noticed him lurking around like an evil genius, at all hours. I have always feared that man. He always seemed to be watching without looking. He moves like a cat. He is tall and spare, and wears an evil smile which makes me shudder. I cannot tell you why, but I have always feared that man—feared him for my mistress' sake, not for my own. I have the feeling that he is not far away, sir."

"Humph!" said Nick. "All right, Suzanne; I will see that some one is provided to care for him, in case he appears. And now, if you please, since you are so good at descriptions, I will ask you to give me a description of Madame Natalie Luzerne."

"Ah, sir, that is more difficult; but I think I can do it."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TESTIMONY OF A CIGAR.

"It is always more difficult to describe a beautiful woman, than one who is plain," began Suzanne, "and Madame Natalie is a beautiful woman. You have read in books about women who glide rather than walk, have you not? Well, Madame Natalie glides. She is as graceful as a fawn, and as quick in her motions as a panther, nevertheless.

"She has the most beautiful black eyes I ever saw. They shine like stars, but can droop as demurely as a young girl's. Her hair is black, too—as black as her eyes, and so luxuriant that it makes a woman wonder how she can keep it in place. Yet it is always perfectly dressed, and is never out of place by a hair. A woman notices such things, Mr. Carter."

"Yes, indeed."

"She is slight without being slim, and plump without being fat. She dresses in the most exquisite taste, and she has a way of smiling at you like an angel out of heaven.

"Her hands—I saw them ungloved once—are the most perfect hands I ever saw; and her voice—I have never anywhere with her, although I have heard her speak many times—it is wonderful. I cannot describe it.

"I have given you a very poor description, I fear, but it is the best I can do. I can only add that even the beauty of my mistress paled before hers. Do you think you would know her from the description I have given?"

The inspector and the coroner were smiling, but Nick Carter's face was stern and sad.

It was a perfect description of Zanoni, to which he had listened.

"Yes," he said, replying to the maid's question, "I think I might recognize her. And now, Suzanne, if you will prepare yourself for the part you are to play in the parlor. I will send the young man to you as soon as possible. Your man room, and the rooms of your associate servants will remain at your disposal for the present. You are not to reply to anything in the shape of questions which may be asked of you. Please inform the others of this order. You are—none of you—to enter this part of the suit. Indeed, it will be locked so that you cannot do so. I will see you again this evening."

Suzanne courtesied and withdrew, and the three officers were alone together.

A moment later the coroner also took his departure, after having agreed with the inspector upon the course of their procedure, which was immediately to follow.

Nick Carter and the inspector were alone in the apartment together.

"Well, Nick," said the inspector, "you have got something up your sleeve. What is it?"

"It is mighty little, when all is said," replied the detective. "The fact is, I am not half so well informed as you have been led to suppose."

"But you know something more than has been developed here."

"Yes, and no. Very little, in fact."

"You are going to tell me what that little is?"

"Certainly I am; but first, come again into the bedroom for a moment."

He led the way to the broken case which had contained the dagger, and pointed to two or three little flakes of cigar ashes that were inside of it.

"Do you see those?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"I closed the case so quickly that you could not see them when we were in here before," continued the detective, "because I did not wish to discuss the matter any further, at present, in the presence of the coroner."

"I noticed that you shut the lid down awfully quick when you found that the dagger was not here," said the inspector.

"I did it because I discovered those flakes of ashes. Now, what do you think of a man who would come in here after that weapon, with a cigar, probably lighted, in his hand?"

"I should think him either very foolhardy, or very cool."

"I'll tell you what I think of it, if you care to have me."

"Of course I do."

"We know that Von Bulow lighted a cigar while he was in the parlor with Madame Yagarosi. He doubtless asked permission to smoke and she granted it."

"Well?"

"The lighting of that cigar would naturally occur just as he was on the point of leaving her. There are no other ashes around, and hence we are to conclude that much. Therefore, he went away as soon as he had lighted his cigar."

"Just what do you consider that fact has to do with these ashes here?"

"That is what I am getting at. Von Bulow stole that dagger, didn't he?"

"Of course. We are both satisfied of that much, and he shall be arrested at once."

"Not quite so fast, old chap. The fact that he remained in the parlor all that time is positive proof that he has no fear in this matter. He has covered his tracks too well, or thinks he has, so he will not attempt to escape at once, or, if he does, you have him watched so that he will find it a difficult matter to escape."

"Very good. Now return to the present point."

"He wanted that dagger; why, we do not know; but he wanted it."

"He wished to use it in murdering her."

"Yes; but there was another reason, which we do not understand, why he wished the deed committed with that particular weapon."

"All right. Go ahead."

"He could not enter this room while madame was in the parlor, and take it; it is also doubtful if he could have induced her, through any subterfuge, to leave the parlor long enough to do so; and, again, if she had left the parlor, she would naturally have come to this room."

"Well?"

"But Suzanne says that she went out within fifteen minutes of his departure."

"That is true."

"So I make it appear that he had said something to her which he knew positively would induce her to go out at once. Her habit of self-restraint made her appear quite natural to her maid, and yet Suzanne says she frowned and said but little."

"What of all that?"

"Why, merely that Von Bulow knew that she would go almost as soon as he left her, and he was so positive of it that he loitered about the corridor until she had gone. Doubtless, when he was leaving, he even took the pains to spring the catch on the door so that he would only have to turn the knob to enter, when he returned, knowing that madame would be too careless or in too great haste to notice the fact. See?"

"Yes."

"The cigar ashes tell us the story."

"Certainly."

"He lighted the cigar the last thing before leaving. He probably passed to the door, and stood there a moment, while he arranged the catch; then he bowed, closed the door, and, presumably, took his departure. The way for him to return at his leisure was open to him."

"Sure."

"He had only to make sure that madame had gone out; and he waited to do that."

"Still smoking as calmly as a chimney, doubtless."

"Yes, and strolling along the corridor in the most natural way, as if he owned the hotel, for that is the way he walks. But he made sure to remain where he could see when madame went out, and then, having waited sufficiently for the maid to get out of the way, he calmly returned to the door, opened it slowly, saw that the coast was clear, and entered."

"And the rest was easy."

"Certainly. He did not even throw away his cigar. There was no need for it. He had already spread tobacco smoke in the room, and he knew he would not be but a

moment or two in securing what he was after. When he went out again, he sprung back the catch, so that the door locked itself after him, and the act was done. He was merely careless about those ashes, that is all."

"It seems to me that we have a rather clear case against him, Nick."

"Yes; but it isn't clear enough; and, besides, I don't believe it was he who struck the dagger into the body of Madame Yagarosi."

"You think it was the woman, Natalie?"

"I think it was a woman."

"Why?"

"A man could not have done it without taking ten times the chances of discovery that a woman would do."

"I can see that, of course."

"When that blow was struck, there was certainly a gasp and a shudder from the victim."

"Sure, and the body would have fallen from the chair to the floor from the force of the blow alone, if it had not been supported."

"Certainly. So, you see, a man could not have done it as deftly as a woman. Whoever did it, approached from behind, and managed, silently, to bend over the victim at the very instant the blow fell. A woman could do that, and also place a sustaining arm around the body, without attracting attention; a man who did such a thing would be noticed."

"Whoever struck the blow must understand how to do such things mighty well."

"Yes. The death was frightfully sudden, but I think it will develop that it resulted from a poison with which the dagger is tipped, rather than from the wound itself. The poison probably paralyzed while the wound did the actual killing."

"And that was why they wanted that particular weapon."

"Doubtless it was at least one of the reasons."

"And that brings us back to the point. What information is it that you have held in reserve until we could be alone together?"

"As I have already told you, it is very little; but it is enough to assure me that this poor woman is the victim of a society rather than of a personal revenge, although there is something of a personal nature in it, too."

"This Count von Bulow?"

"Yes; he was in love with her. There is no doubt of that. She scorned him, and I have not a doubt that this last interview of theirs was his last effort to induce her to listen to him. But, behind all, there is a secret society which has condemned her to death. A Russian society, not of nihilists, but which is the enemy of nihilism, and therefore as dangerous. Shall I tell you about it?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE DETECTIVE'S PHANTOM MASCOT.

After a moment of silence, the detective continued:

"It is about four months ago since I received a letter from Gen. Yagarosi, in which he commended his wife to my especial care, and in which he said that her life was in imminent peril, every day, because of the enmity of a certain society in Russia."

"What sort of a society? You say it is not nihilism."

"No; it is the antithesis of nihilism. The name of it is unpronounceable, and the best translation I can give you is to call it Russophobia—Russian mad. They call themselves purists, and they oppose everything which is not built upon the old theory of the absolute invulnerability of the nobles. They would assassinate their emperor as quickly as a nihilist, if he should dare to depart for one moment from the autocratic practices of his government. It is this society which would keep the peasantry in utter ignorance, which makes it a crime for one of them to possess a book, which holds them as slaves, and which did more than any other influence in Russia to bring about the present war."

"It is their theory that the peasantry were increasing too fast, and that a war of this kind would kill off a few hundred thousands of them."

"That is why they have been driven like sheep to the slaughter."

The inspector lighted a cigar.

"Madame Yagarosi was the daughter of one of the oldest, if not the richest, families in Russia. She fell in love with Yagarosi and decided to marry him, but the opposition was so intense that it ended in his recall from the legation in St. Petersburg, where he was stationed, and to her own banishment to a country estate of her father's in southern Russia."

"She remained there three years, during which time she succeeded in convincing her relatives that she had given up all thought of her Japanese lover."

"She was taken back to St. Petersburg. Later she was permitted to accompany some friends to Paris, and from there she managed to make her escape."

"Her lover, then a captain, was with the legation in London. She joined him there and they were married."

"Later the czar granted her some sort of a pardon, and she was permitted to return for a time, to St. Petersburg, as a Japanese subject. While there, two or three attempts were made to assassinate her, but she was so well guarded that she escaped each time."

"The letters of the general have recited these facts and were, merely adding that he had reason to believe that the attempts would be made against her life while she was in this country awaiting the end of the war."

"So much for that part of it."

"I have had several interviews with Madame Yagarosi, and she has impressed me always as a person of extraordinary character."

"The opposition to her marriage and the enmity resulting from it, together with the fact that she was in a measure ostracised by her own set in St. Petersburg, when she returned there, to say nothing of the attempts to assassinate her, had embittered her so against her native country and people that she hated them as cordially as any Japanese. She had become a Jap in heart if not in fact."

"There is no question in my mind but that she was acting in the capacity of a spy in some form, though I am certain that it was without the knowledge of her husband. She as much as admitted it to me at our last interview."

"Again, she admitted something, although very little about a gentleman who had been too assiduous in his attentions—this Von Bulow, of course, although she did not mention his name, and at our last interview she said to me, smilingly:

"My old friends in Russia are not satisfied to have me live. Sooner or later I will be assassinated, and I do not think you can prevent it, when the time comes for the blow to fall."

"Now, inspector, there is the case in a nutshell, and that is all I know about it."

"What was this last letter you received from her husband?"

"Merely a request that I use my best efforts to persuade her to return at once to Japan, it being his conviction that she would be safer there than here."

"And you had sent her word that you were to call upon her?"

"I had telephoned to the hotel. There was one paragraph in the general's letter which made me think that the danger to her was more threatening than she realized, and I was in haste to discuss it with her."

"What was that?"

"He stated that he had private advices that three special emissaries had been sent out from the society in St. Petersburg, to assassinate her, and that she had been charged by them with being a spy in the service of Japan. He added that this last was, of course, not true, but that the fact that it was not did not tend to lessen the danger to her."

"And the whole amount of it is that the emissaries got here before you did."

"So it would seem."

"Well, what do you suggest doing now? Shall we arrest Von Bulow at once, or shall we give him a little more rope?"

"What is your opinion, inspector?"

"I don't think he can get away from us."

"Nor I."

"We haven't any very substantial proof against him as yet. Only a few cigar ashes, and the fact that he was known to her while he proceeded in the parlor that he was not."

"No; and I think he fancies himself in perfect security."

"Anyhow, he can't get away."

"Then you agree with me that it is as well to let him go loose for a day or two, while we keep an eye on him?"

"Yes."

"Now, old chap, there is another point which is a greater mystery to me than all the others."

"What is that?"

"Zanoni."

"What!!!" exclaimed the inspector.

"My dear inspector, I am taking you into my confidence in this matter as a friend, and not as a police officer, and I want you to promise me that you will take cognizance of it only in that way until I give you leave to do otherwise."

"Certainly, Nick."

"There is a Zanoni here who answers to the description of the Zanoni we have known in the past, and whom for more than two years we have supposed to be dead."

"The Zanoni we knew is at the bottom of the sea; at least, I have your own testimony to substantiate that statement."

"I have sincerely believed her to be dead," said Nick, slowly, "and I cannot now think otherwise; and yet, there is a Madame Zanoni who answers to her description."

"I thought that Suzanne gave a fair description of her when she was describing the woman, Natalie," said the inspector.

"And I also; but I regard that merely as a coincidence."

"Well, what about this other one?"

"It was she whom those four young women in the parlor came to meet. If I remember her handwriting at all, it was she who sent me that card upon which was written instructions to watch Von Bulow."

"Do you suppose, Nick, that she has really come to life, and that she has returned to her old trade of murder?"

"It is possible that she did not die out there on the island in the Pacific; it is possible that she did not leap into the sea at the time I supposed she did, and that she found, later, a way to return to civilization—these things are possible, but that she has returned to her old career of murder I do not and will not believe. The Zanoni who leaped into the sea was not the Zanoni whom we have known in the past. She was a different woman altogether."

"And yet, Nick, if she is here—if she was here at the time—"

"No, inspector, I will not believe—but we will not argue. I shall find Zanoni, if it is Zanoni I have heard about, and I will know from herself, then."

The inspector shrugged his shoulders and turned away, walked to the window and stood there staring out at the gathering twilight. After a moment he returned.

"I don't believe it was Zanoni at all," he said; "but, at all events, we will await developments, and in the meantime I will treat the information exactly as you requested."

"Thank you, old chap."

"And now, what do you propose for the next move?"

"I shall shadow Von Bulow."

"Yourself?"

"Yes."

"And you think he will lead you to the others—Natalie and the man with the devil's face?"

"I think it more than likely."

"And then——?"

"How can we say what then? The case must develop itself."

"I think we have the murderer in our clutches now, Nick—or, at least, one of them—in Von Bulow."

"So do I. But with the evidence in our possession, he can laugh at us. I don't think your celebrated Third Degree would have much effect upon a man like him."

"No; I suppose not."

"Hello! What's that?" exclaimed Nick, suddenly.

He started to his feet and leaped to the door, throwing it open as quickly as possible; but, notwithstanding the quickness of his act, the hall was deserted. There was not a person of any description in sight.

He ran first one way and then another, in the effort to discover evidence of some person endeavoring to escape from view; and after a moment, disappointed, he returned to the room where the inspector was awaiting him.

And the latter was standing in the middle of the floor, holding in his hand the note which had been thrust underneath the door.

"I reckon you've got a phantom mascot, Nick. Look here," he said.

CHAPTER X.

MEPHISTOPHELES FINDS HIS MATCH.

The article which had been so mysteriously shoved under the door, and which the inspector now held in his hand, was a folded sheet of the hotel paper; the writer of it either had not had time to inclose it in an envelope, or had considered it unimportant to do so.

And the handwriting upon it was the same in character

as that which had been on the card delivered to the detective in the parlor of the hotel, at the time when he was conversing with Lucinda Dwelling and the Count von Bulow.

This fact alone was sufficiently startling to the detective; but it was the contents of the note and the remark made by the inspector which affected him most.

The writing was as follows:

"Madame Yagarosi was killed by a servant in the employ of Von Bulow, and while he was seated in the parlor, looking on. Natalie Luzerne is innocent in fact, though guilty in intent. A note from me which you will find at your own house within an hour will be more explicit."

"It would seem, Nick, that you have arrived at a point in your career where your detective work is being done for you," said the inspector, with a smile.

"Is that why you referred to the incident in the way you did?" asked the detective.

"By referring to the writer of this note as a phantom mascot?"

"Yes."

"That's about the size of it."

"But why a mascot, inspector?"

"Well, first you receive a note telling you to watch Von Bulow, when you had no thought of watching him; that is correct, is it not?"

"Entirely."

"Very well. Presently, after that incident, we find that there was good reason to watch Von Bulow, and therefore that the information was correct. Now, at the time of the receipt of that first card, you dash out of the parlor in search of the writer of it, but you fail to discover her. Next, after we have searched these rooms and have about come to the conclusion that Natalie Luzerne is the guilty party, we are again set on the right track by this same mysterious personage—and again you fail to find her. That is also correct, eh?"

"Supposedly so, at least."

"And also you have been talking about Zanoni—Zanoni, whom we both have reason to suppose is dead."

"Yes."

"And you have bound me to secrecy about the matter—at least, for the present."

"Not exactly to secrecy, but to personal repression for the present."

"It amounts to the same thing. As far as I am concerned, Zanoni does not exist any more than she did twenty-four hours ago, and hence I have given her a name."

"I see."

"I have called her Nick Carter's phantom mascot."

"Which is an admission on your part that you agree

with me in believing that there is a possibility that she is still alive."

"Call it what you please. My only admission in the case is that you have a phantom mascot."

"And you agree with me that it would be an excellent idea to discover, without delay, what is in that note at my house?"

"Just that."

"Shall we go there now?"

"At once, if you think you are through here."

"I am through here as soon as I have telephoned to Ten-Ichi and Patsy to be on hand to assist Suzanne in her watch."

"Do you really believe that anything will come of that?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I haven't an idea, save that I do believe that something will come of it. Something always does come of things when one banks upon them. It is partly the effort and partly the fact, I think."

"And Von Bulow? You said only a few moments ago that you intended to shadow him yourself."

"True; but I had not then heard of the phantom mascot," replied Nick, with a smile. "I think now that I will set Chick after him—at least, until we have read that note."

"That may be easier said than done."

"You mean that he may already have left the hotel, and that your man who is shadowing him may be as hard to find as the man himself?"

"Exactly that."

Nick Carter smiled broadly.

"I know you well enough, inspector, to know that whoever it was you put on Von Bulow's trail, he will leave some sort of a track which another one of your men can pick up at a moment's notice."

"It was Legrande," said the inspector, laconically.

"Good! Then Chick will know how to take up the trail, and the two can work together admirably. They know each other's work."

"Then we will close these rooms now; eh?"

"Yes."

"There is nothing more to be done here save to go through madame's papers."

"And that would do us no good at all. Madame Yagarosi has learned wisdom from her experiences, and she saved no papers or letters. There is nothing more to be found here. We have discovered all there is to find."

"Then if you will attend to your telephone, I will see to the sealing of the rooms and to the proper disposition of Jean and Marie. I will also make all the necessary arrangements with the proprietor of the hotel."

The officers in the hallway were still there, and to them the inspector delivered his directions as they were leaving the place.

Nick repaired to the telephone and communicated with his own house, and within fifteen minutes the inspector and the detective left the hotel together.

But as they walked away, a face looked out at them from between the curtains in the parlor, and that face resembled an antiquated edition of Mephistopheles. It was a face of old parchment, with eyes which might have been made of glass—and a smile in which there was no mirth; a smile which was a grimace or a sardonic grin.

The owner of that face stood in an embrasure of one of the windows. He was tall and lean and spare; and he seemed, when you looked at his back, to be a young man—and when you looked into his face, to be an octogenarian.

He gazed out of the window at them as they passed; and then he turned and with a quick gaze which seemed to sweep the room at a glance, studied every person there.

His eyes rested for just an instant upon Suzanne, who had taken her seat at that moment, and they glittered like the eyes of a venomous serpent about to strike.

But he saw, or believed he saw, that she had not seen him, and he stole to the door like a living shadow, passed out, and was gone.

A moment later he was in the street, and half a block in advance of him, going down the avenue side by side, were the two detectives, the inspector and Nick Carter.

It did not occur to Mephistopheles to look behind him; he was too intent upon his own occupation of watching ahead. If he had looked, it is safe to say that he would have been astounded, for with half the vigilance he expended upon the two in front of him, he would have discovered Suzanne.

Suzanne had thought rapidly and very much to the point in that instant when she recognized the Mephistopheles of her description, there in the parlor, and had turned her head away in order that he might not discover that she had seen him.

As yet the young man whom the detective had said would address her and would be at hand to render her assistance at a moment's notice, had not appeared, and she did not know what to do.

It was her own opinion that this man whom she had described as graphically was more worth attention in the present crisis than all the others combined; and it was her woman's intuition which acted on the spur of the moment and which rose to the occasion.

She also had seen the two detectives go out, and she was perfectly aware that this man was watching them.

On the instant she decided to act on her own responsibility, irrespective of the instructions she had received.

She believed that one or both of the two men, the detective or the inspector, was in imminent danger, and she regarded it as her duty to do what she could do to save them.

Without an instant of hesitation, she rose and glided after him.

She was dressed for the street, according to the directions she had received and while she felt her own incompetency to contend with such a character as this Mephistopheles, she still believed that she would be able somehow to warn Nick Carter or his companion.

And Mephistopheles himself never dreamed that she had followed; he had no idea that she had seen him at all; he regarded her only as a maid, whose limited intellect did not admit of her appearing in the character of an enemy, or as one inimical to his interests.

If he thought about the situation at all, and it is probable that he gave it a moment's consideration, it was merely to suppose that the maid, now that her mistress was dead, had chosen to array herself in some of madame's garments and to pose in the parlor.

But Suzanne was made of different metal than that.

As her replies had indicated when she was questioned by the detective, she was far above her station in many respects. She was bright, quick and observing, and the murder of her mistress had called to the surface every latent force she possessed.

And so it was that she glided after the Mephistopheles of the story, gradually drawing nearer to him as they advanced, until she was not more than half a dozen paces behind him; and thus it happened that she was close upon him when, at the door of Nick Carter's house, as the two detectives were in the act of ascending the steps, he raised his right hand over his shoulder, and was in the very act of hurling something from it at the two men, when Suzanne seized his wrist and held it.

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER ALWAYS WINS.

The arm of this modern Mephistopheles was powerful, notwithstanding his supposed advanced age, and the arm of Suzanne was weak in comparison.

Nevertheless, she saw the act which would have done murder to one of the two men on the steps of the house in front of them. She saw the brawny arm raised; she saw the bony hand clutching a murderous-looking knife; she saw the look of fiendish exultation on the face of the man who wielded it—in fact, she realized the crisis, and she acted.

With a scream such as only a startled woman can give, she leaped forward; and it was doubtless the scream as much as the act itself which disconcerted the aim and

the ambition of the human devil who was seeking only to kill.

Her slender fingers seized upon the bony wrist—just too late to prevent the knife from leaping from the grasp of that muscular hand—but nevertheless just in time to avert the disaster which would have happened had she waited in the hotel for the coming of Patsy or Ten-Ichi.

The knife went forward, but it went wide of its aim.

It flew, not into the heart of Nick Carter, not into the breast of the inspector, who has more friends among the men of the city than any other police officer who ever acted in an executive capacity here—but into the door itself.

It went past the arm of the detective; it must, in fact, have gone underneath it; and it hung, quivering, in the woodwork just above the point where he would have inserted his key.

The two men had been so intent upon seeking the possible solution of their mystery, as presumably contained in the letter which was to be left at the house of the detective, that neither had any thought of a possible trailer.

Police officers, as a rule, are in less danger from threats than any other class of persons. Judges are sometimes killed, though rarely. District attorneys have been shot at, but rarely hit. Detectives have been assaulted, but never injured, save in one rare case where Red Leary swore vengeance and executed it. The history of crime is like the history of nations—a matter of rise and fall—of the swinging of the pendulum.

Association with danger and with the threats of people who forget, lends to a man in Nick Carter's position a sort of contempt for consequences.

When the inspector and Nick heard the scream of Suzanne, they also heard the singing of the flying knife, and the "plunk!" it made when it struck the door just above the keyhole.

It was Nick who turned in time to take in the situation.

He saw the cadaverous person who thus far had been described as Mephistopheles; he saw him, or, rather, his wrist, in the grasp of Suzanne; he saw him whirl and strike, and he saw Suzanne sink backward upon the pavement—and he also saw the man leap upon the box of a flying cab, hurl the driver to the pavement, seize the whip and strike the horse, and without a word he turned and leaped down the steps after the flying cab.

It was then that he executed one of those wonderful sharp shots for which he has become so famous.

He realized that the cab was escaping, and that he could not hope to capture the man on the box unless he resorted to extraordinary measures, and as the cab was in the act of turning the corner, his right hand shot out and an explosion followed.

The horse, shot through the brain, pitched forward and fell in a heap on the pavement; and the cab, dragging at the rate of twenty miles an hour or more, was precipitated over the body of the horse.

The man on the box leaped for safety; but he was too late; and when the usual crowd had collected and the would-be murderer was picked up, it was still the face of an antiquated Mephistopheles that he bore, save where the blood had oozed from a wound at the side of his head.

There the enamel had been washed away, and there, underneath the paint and pigment, glowed what would have been the complexion of a young man, had it been less pale and less drawn, and had the death wound not already have been administered.

And while the detective bent over him, consciousness returned for a moment, and the man on the pavement, with a blanket under his head, looked up into the face of the detective and tried to smile.

"You always win, Carter," he said, whispering the words. "You win even now. You have won every trick in the hands we have played. Isn't it time that I gave up?"

"You could fight me much better in St. Petersburg than here," replied Nick. "Why did you elect to come here?"

"I followed her. There; don't try to talk to me now. Things are swimming in my head. If I recover consciousness, I will tell you all about it; if not—why, then, you will have to guess the rest."

"Do you mean that you followed Madame Yagarosi?"

"Yes."

"But why? She was not Yvonne."

"No; but she was Yvonne's own cousin, and she knows where Yvonne is now. Bah! Take me to a hospital, or take me to your own house, as you will. I would rather you would not reveal my identity, but if you feel that you must do so, do it."

He lapsed into unconsciousness then, and at the same moment the inspector arrived on the scene, and also an ambulance which had been called.

"There are three grand dukes in Russia who bear the name of Michael," said Nick, in an undertone, to the inspector. "This man is one of them—never mind which one. It was in his house where I had the battle with the python—I think I told you about that. This whole matter is, after all, a love affair, and not one of politics."

It was an ambulance from the New York Hospital which had replied to the summons, and directions were given that the injured gentleman be given a private room there, and that every possible attention be paid to him; but also that at least one of his attendants should be an officer from the central office, and that no person what-

ever should be permitted to see him without the permission of the inspector.

"He struck Suzanne," said Nick to the inspector, as they turned away. "What of her?"

"He merely knocked her down. She is not hurt."

"And where is she now?"

"In your house."

"That is well. By the way, I forgot to pay for that dead horse."

"I attended to that, Nick. The cabman will call at the department about it."

"All right. Charge the affair to me. Let me pay for it without question. That will be easier than to have unpleasant questions asked."

"This case is harking back to ancient history for you, isn't it, Nick?"

"Rather."

"Some cases which you had almost forgotten?"

"Hardly that; but a case or two which had been dormant in my mind so long that I regarded them as past."

"And this Michael—who is he?"

"Let us call him a cousin of the czar's."

"He is at least a relative of the czar; eh?"

"Yes."

"And Yvonne?"

"She is—or was—one of the bravest, most courageous and most beautiful women I ever knew."

"Not Madame Yagarosi?"

"No."

They walked on in silence for some distance, and, in fact, had arrived at the door of the detective's house before another word was uttered between them.

As they were crossing the threshold, the inspector broke the silence.

"Chick and Patsy and Ten-Ichi have gone out in obedience to your orders, Nick," he said; "but the letter we expected is here."

"Ah!" replied Nick. "So much the better."

"You seem to expect great things from that letter."

"I do."

"What do you expect from it?"

"A solution of this mystery."

"From the letter itself?"

"No; but from the writer of the letter."

"But the writer of the letter is not here."

"The writer of the letter has been and must be found."

"And you think it is Zanoni?"

"I am positive that it is."

"But how is Zanoni familiar with those things? How does he know about that time in Russia?"

"Those are questions which Zanoni must answer. I have sent her a message, which I am positive that Miss Yvonne will deliver. When she receives that message,

she will appear—perhaps not to you, but certainly to me."

"And then you think the entire mystery will be explained?"

"I think she has the explanation of it all."

"And the old charges against Zanoni, Nick? What about them?"

"I have your word for them until I have talked with her."

"Yes; I will stand for that."

"That is all I ask, old chap. Just stand for me through this thing for the present, and it will all come out as plain as daylight before we are much older. The fact of the whole matter is this, inspector. This is a sort of relash of events which happened in Russia when I went there long ago at the solicitation of the Mikado of Japan. I have found in my experience that there is no national affair of sufficient importance that some love affair does not control it. In this case it was controlled by the love of this Michael, for the beautiful countess whom you have heard referred to as Yvonne. It is evident that he has forsaken title and place, estate and wealth, to follow her, and it is also evident that he has been unable to find her. Through the death of Madame Yagarosi, we will solve the mystery, and it is not far off. Will you be content to wait another day or two?"

"Yes."

"Then I think I may promise you. And now, here is Peter with Zanoni's letter."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONSPIRACY OF AN EMPIRE.

Peter, Nick Carter's principal factotum in the house, appeared at that moment with a sealed envelope upon the salver he held in his right hand.

"This was left here for you, chief," he said, standing still at arm's length; "but I was requested to deliver it to you only when you were alone."

The inspector turned as if to withdraw from the room, but Nick detained him with a gesture; then, without a word, he took the letter from the salver, opened it, and read it to the end without a change of countenance.

After that he walked to the window and stood there for a moment, looking out, while Peter and the inspector still retained their respective places in the center of the room.

Presently he turned back from the window with the open letter still in his hand, and advancing to the inspector, placed it in his hand.

"Read," he said, "then do me the kindness to wait for me here. Peter, you may return to your own department."

The note was short. The inspector read it to the end while the servant was in the act of leaving the room; and as soon as they were alone he replaced it in the envelope and returned it to the detective.

"Thank you, Nick," he said. "I will wait here, as you suggest."

For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes, and it is doubtful if greater confidence or greater trust was ever exchanged between two persons than that which passed from each to the other at that moment.

Then Nick Carter turned silently and left the room.

As he mounted the stairs he paused more than once, as if he hesitated; and yet not one of the pauses he made was sufficient to bring him to an utter stop.

At the top of the stairs he went directly to the door of his own private study, and there again he hesitated for an instant.

Then he opened the door and entered the room.

There was a woman seated there. She was closely veiled, and her clothing, while it could not be described as mourning, was still sufficiently somber in hue to have answered to such a description.

As he entered, she rose from the chair she had been occupying and took a step toward him, and then she paused, irresolutely. And Nick paused also, having closed the door behind him.

"Is it Zanoni?" he asked; and then he paused for several seconds, after which he added: "Or is it Lady Mary?"

She did not reply for a full minute; but then, with a sudden gesture, she threw back the veil she wore, disclosing her wondrously beautiful face.

He started forward, although he did not move from his tracks, for she held up a warning hand toward him; and then she asked, softly:

"Which would you have it be?"

"Neither," he replied. "It could not be one, and it must not be the other."

"That is right," she said, softly. "That is the answer I expected. That is the reply I would have had you make. Lady Mary died when she leaped into the sea, out there on that island in the Pacific. Zanoni was already dead then. I am Zanoni; but not the Zanoni you have known in the past."

"I know that," he said.

"This is a transfigured Zanoni; a new being; a new creation."

"Yes," he said, and he crossed to the window.

"Does Lord Algy still live?" she asked of him; and there was a pathetic ring in her soft tones as she uttered the question.

"Sometimes," he murmured. "Sometimes when I am alone; when I am where I can gaze off at the ocean."

She came nearer to him and rested one hand on his

shoulder; but he shook it off and retreated a step; and she shrank back to her former position.

"Can you imagine," she asked, "two people standing upon precipices with an impassable gulf between them, looking toward one another and yet each fully aware that there is no bridge in heaven or on earth which can cross that chasm?"

"Yes," he replied.

"That is where we stand."

"Yes," he said again.

"My sins were such that they can never be washed as white as wool, according to the scriptural doctrine, 'but they can be put behind me, far in the past, and whatever the good God has in store for me, there may at least be no more sins to answer for. I do not expect to atone for the past; I only hope to do what may be done by a weak mortal like myself, in an effort to atone. Do you comprehend my meaning?"

"Perfectly," he replied.

"There is a joy in living a life of atonement which is far greater than can be found in a life of sin."

"And what do you propose to do?" he asked.

"To live that life of atonement, even unto the end of my days. To devote my life to the effort to save others from the pitfalls into which I fell. To give up my days and my all to others. To try to win forgiveness from Heaven."

"God help you!" he murmured.

"Thank you," she replied. "And now, let us change the subject. First, you will promise to make no effort to find me, will you not?"

"Yes; I promise."

"Miss Dwelling has already given me your message. That is why I am here. Do you believe in me—in my sincerity?"

"Yes."

"You received my messages at the Hotel Sushehima?"

"Yes."

"You remember my power when I was called the woman wizard? You know that I have ways of finding out things and of doing things which are the results of my studied in the Far East?"

"Yes," he repeated.

"You did not know me when you were in St. Petersburg. You never knew that the princess who was killed in the room behind the throne and the countess who was so brave in her defense—in her sister's defense—had a cousin who was named Zanoni, did you?"

"No; I never knew that."

"Ah, well, it is a long story—a family history with which you need not be troubled now; but I am an own cousin to Yvonne. Madame Yagarosi was another cousin, the daughter of a sister of my mother's. I was on that

far island in the Pacific, alone for more than a year, and when at last I was taken off, it was a Russian ship which took me away, and presently I was in St. Petersburg again—the home of my childhood.

"Since then I have been alternately with Olga Yagarosi and with Yvonne, my cousins, who are also cousins to each other.

"It was I who besought Gen. Yagarosi to entreat you to watch over his wife, and it has been I who have watched over her as best I might, knowing that sooner or later she would be assassinated."

"And it was you who sent me the card in the parlor, telling me to watch Von Bulow?"

"Yes."

"And who put the note under the door while the inspector and I were in the room where Madame Yagarosi had lived?"

"Yes."

"You stated in that note that it was a servant of Von Bulow's who struck the blow which killed madame, and that Natalie Lu——"

"Natalie is Yvonne. Need I say more?"

Nick turned and braced himself.

"Then who is the person who struck the blow?" he demanded. "It is time that I should know, if you have the information to give me."

"Do you not know already?" she demanded. "Have you not had a person described to you who looks like an antiquated Mephistopheles?"

"But he was—is, no servant of Von Bulow's."

"He passed as one."

"Yes; but in reality——"

"In reality he is Michael, the man who has pursued Yvonne since she was a child, and who will never relinquish that pursuit while he lives. The man from whom she has fled from country to country, across oceans, through forests, over mountains—through hell, almost."

"I know," said Nick. "I know; but he will pursue her no more. He is dying, now," and then in a few words he related to her what had happened; but when he had finished, he added, suddenly:

"But why should he murder Madame Yagarosi? What was she to him, or how did she interfere in his plans?"

"She had penetrated his disguise. She knew who he was. She had informed the government at St. Petersburg where he was. That is why."

"And yet," said Nick, "I do not think it was he who killed her."

"Who, then?"

"Von Bulow."

"Possibly," she admitted.

"Why should Madame Yagarosi have been in danger

at all, save from the machinations of this prince?" asked Nick.

"Because she had in reality acted as a spy, and the fact was known to the Third Section of the St. Petersburg police; because Von Bulow was in love with her, and for her scorn of him he sought vengeance in betraying her to his government; and because she had incurred the enmity of the prince, as I have already said, by penetrating his disguise and betraying the fact where it would do the most good or the most harm, as you choose to apply the term. Ah, there were a hundred things working against them both—against Olga and Yvonne."

"And these hundred things culminated in the murder of to-day."

"Yes."

"Then Von Bulow is the man. Von Bulow is the man, and before the sun sets on another day, he shall answer for it."

"Amen," said Zanoni, fervently.

CHAPTER XIII.

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES.

Both Chick and Legrande—the shadow who had been detailed by the inspector to keep on the trail of Von Bulow—seemed to have disappeared utterly from view.

The day which succeeded the exciting one which has been described, passed without a word being received from either of them, nor could the detective himself discover any trace of them, or of the man they were shadowing.

To add to the mystery of the occasion, Ten-Ichi and Patsy had also failed to report.

It will be remembered that they had been sent to the Hotel Sushehima upon the telephonic order of their chief, and that they were detailed there to wait upon the suggestions of the maid, Suzanne, who was stationed in the parlor.

But we have seen how Suzanne, excited over her discovery of the presence of Prince Michael, whom she regarded as a Mephistopheles, had left her post in order to follow him, and had done so before the arrival of either of the young assistants.

Suzanne, knocked down by the prince, had soon recovered, and was dispatched at once to the hotel, where it was expected that she would find the two young men waiting for her. She had only to take her seat in the parlor, as she had been directed to do in the beginning, and to wait for them to account her, and this she had promised to do.

And herein was the third mystery of the occasion, for Suzanne had not arrived at the hotel at all, or if she had, she had not been seen by any person who

recognized her, and she certainly was not there when the detective inquired for her.

Thus, the situation at ten o'clock the following morning was:

Chick and Legrande had unaccountably disappeared.

Patsy and Ten-Ichi were missing, and Suzanne had vanished.

And the situation did not change during all that day, although the detective used every effort in his power to obtain some trace of them, and the inspector from the central office placed his entire force at the disposal of Nick Carter to assist him.

"There can be only one explanation of the mystery," said Nick Carter to the inspector, when they met at the office of the latter at ten o'clock that evening, "and that is that the conspiracy concerning which the murder of Madame Yagarosi is only an incident, is of a much wider range than we anticipated."

"Humph!" remarked the inspector; and he lighted a cigar.

"Hermann von Bulow is evidently a much more dangerous man than we gave him credit for being," continued the detective.

"Do you mean to say that you think Von Bulow has captured the whole bunch?" asked the inspector.

"Just that; no more, no less."

"If it were only the two lads and the woman," growled the inspector, "I might agree with you, but two such practiced men as Chick and Legrande—well, I can't see it that way. I could as soon think of his capturing you and me, and carrying us off like a pair of infants in swaddling clothes."

"All the same, they have disappeared."

"I have to admit that much."

"And I know that Chick would have reported to me before this if it had been possible for him to do so."

"I think Legrande would have done the same."

"Then where are they?"

"Humph!" said the inspector again.

"I will tell you my views of the matter, if you don't mind listening," said Nick, after a pause, which both men had passed in deep thought.

"All right. Go ahead, Nick; but don't go in too deep. I will confess that I begin to see visions of the war between Russia and Japan transferred from Manchuria to the city of New York."

"That is just the point, inspector. That is just what has happened; or, rather, that is just what is happening. A certain part of that war has been, or is being, transferred to this country."

"I don't think that I quite catch on to that idea, just as you present it," remarked the inspector, applying a hand to his forehead, which had gone out.

"This country has been pro-Japanese since the beginning of the conflict; you will admit that?"

"Certainly."

"Russia has her secret agents everywhere—almost as much in New York as in Paris and London."

"We are both rather thoroughly aware of that fact."

"I have had considerable to do with the redoubtable Third Section of the Russian police, and I know something of its ramifications. I know something about how far-reaching it is, and I know also how thoroughly conscienceless it is in carrying a point once determined upon. The officers of that body have almost *carte blanche*. They are the living exponents of the theory of Sandy MacPherson, when he sent his son after fishes, and ordered him to get them honestly if he could, but to get them. I think that Michael is here as the American head of the Third Section, and that Von Bulow is his chief assistant. Michael posed as a servant of Von Bulow for purposes of his own, and—"

"By the way, how is Michael?"

"Alive, but still unconscious."

"Then we can't make him talk."

"No; not for days to come, so the doctors tell me."

"Go ahead, then, with your theorizing."

"It is not all theorizing. Official Russia does not like me, inspector. I forced my way into the presence of the czar, as you know; I compelled him to conduct my party personally to Kronstad and to place us in safety aboard an American war ship then lying in that harbor, and I did other things to defy the Third Section, which they will never forgive. They know that I do not like them any better than they like me, and—here is the point—they believe in their hearts that I am working all the while in the interests of Japan."

"Well?"

"That leads up to the point I was about to make, which is that a section of the famous Third Section has been transferred to this city for the purpose of watching me—to find out what I am doing, if anything, and to put a stop to it if it happens to be inimical to the interests of Russia."

"That sounds reasonable."

"Madame Yagarosi was already known to be a spy, working against them."

"And you were known to be in communication with her. I see."

"Precisely."

"The circumstantial evidence against you and her, in the minds of the Russians, was very strong, and she was killed, when she was killed, to prevent the interview which those men in some manner had discovered had been arranged."

"Yes; already condemned to death, that death was hastened in the manner you suggest. Now, following upon that, Von Bulow, knowing that he was watched—and he must have known it, for he is much too smart not to have discovered that he was shadowed—could easily have led your man and mine into a trap. They are not superhuman. They could easily be captured if taken wholly unawares."

"And if the Third Section has transferred a department of its service to this country for a time, it is easily conceivable that they have sent men enough to do their work; eh?"

"It is not only conceivable, it is actually the fact. Russia never does things by halves. She would not send a corporal's guard here to compete against me. Russian officialdom is quite well acquainted with me, and none better than Michael himself."

"I think you have hit the nail on the head, Nick."

"I think I have."

"Did Zanonì give you this idea?"

"Yes; that is, she gave it to me without herself being aware of it. She has been deceived herself; but she told me enough of the happenings to suggest all this to me, and when our conversation was so closely followed by the mysterious disappearances, there was no other conclusion for me to find."

"Inspector, I am convinced that the Hotel Sushehima was—and doubtless is still—thronged with Russian detectives. I was known to them all, and so were you. Naturally, so was every person in any way connected with Madame Yagarosi. It is even possible that the attendant at the telephone booth is in their employ, and that the directions I telephoned to my house were reported to them."

"So it was an easy matter for them to lay their plans for the reception of Chick and the others; and so, also, it was an easy matter for them to follow Suzanne when she left the hotel on the track of Michael, and to capture her, probably without a struggle, when she left your house to return to the hotel."

"That is the way I see it."

"I hardly think, Nick, that they would dare to murder the whole outfit."

"The killing of Madame Yagarosi has proved that they dare almost anything."

"Then we must find some way to act, and act quickly."

"I think I have already found the way."

"How?"

"I think I remember Von Bulow's face and figure well enough to make up to much like him that I can deceive at least some of his followers. I know the number of his room there, and that he has not yet given it up. I shall appear there about two o'clock this very night, dis-

guised as Von Bulow, and call for his key. I think I will get it."

"And then,—?"

"Somebody in the hotel will accost me; something will happen; I don't know what, but whatever it is, it will serve to put us on the track. Will you help me in this?"

"Will I help you? Well, I should say so!"

"Then I want three or four good men from your department to be on hand when I apply at the hotel, and I want them to be prepared to do my bidding, no matter what it may be."

"You shall have half a dozen, Nick."

"So much the better. Have them at or near the hotel at two o'clock to-night. They will be shrewd enough to know how to make themselves known to me as I approach. They must be prepared to fight, too, for I think there will be a fight in this affair before we are through with it. At two o'clock, remember; that is, in three hours."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CONFESSION OF VON BULOW.

It was eleven o'clock when the detective left the office of the inspector, and he called a cab and was driven directly to his own house.

Readers of the Nick Carter stories are aware of his wonderful ability in the art of making up. It amounted to genius with him. Taught to him by his father many years before, he had continued to improve upon the art, until it had become a simple matter for him to transform himself into a counterpart of almost any person he cared to represent.

Of course, he could not transform himself into a person who was much taller than himself, although he knew how to make himself taller than he really was by at least four inches—that is, by increasing his height at both ends, so to speak; but given a person who was approximately his own stature, whether young or old, Nick Carter could render himself into such a perfect representation of that individual as to deceive his most intimate acquaintances for a time.

But this was the first time in the career of the detective when he had attempted to invent such a disguise without the presence of the second person to copy. However, Von Bulow had made such an impression upon him at the time of their meeting in the parlor of the hotel, that he had no misgivings as to his ability to make himself into a copy of the man who had claimed to be an officer in the German army.

He had decided early in the day upon this course of procedure, and he had already prepared the necessary clothing—the outer garments which to an ordinary observer mark the man more than physical proportions can

do; and when he arrived at his home he lost no time in making his preparations for the rest of the disguise.

He arrived there at half-past eleven, and at twelve he was made up as Von Bulow, and so perfectly that he marveled at himself as he looked in the glass when the disguise was completed.

It will be remembered that the Hotel Sushehima was in the vicinity of Long Acre Square, and the detective, having looked in vain for a message of some sort from one of his assistants, managed so that he arrived at his destination, which was the hotel, at fifteen minutes before the hour agreed upon between him and the inspector.

As he passed the corner near the entrance of the hotel, a man, who staggered a little, ran into him as if by accident, and as he did so, he whispered:

"There are six of us here, Mr. Carter."

"All right," replied Nick. "Where are the others?"

"Handy by. One of them is inside now. He is a Pole who looks Russian. He will accost you as Capt. von Bulow and will speak in the Russian language. He has taken a room in the hotel. The others you need not know until the necessity arrives."

"No."

Nick passed on and entered the hotel.

At the desk, he walked straight to the night clerk and called for the key to 944, which was at once handed to him; and at the same moment, as he was turning away, the Pole accosted him.

"The arrangements are at least complete," was the thought which came to the detective as he turned toward the elevator.

He was disappointed, however, to find that none of the employees of Count von Bulow had thus far fallen into the trap; but he continued on his way to the room, opened the door and entered.

The room—or rather rooms, for there were three of them, a parlor, bedroom and bath—were in total darkness, and not knowing his bearings, the detective paused in the middle of the floor while he dove into one of his pockets for a box of matches with which to strike a light in order that he might discover the location of the electric lights with which the hotel was provided.

He found the box and the match, and he struck the latter against the edge of the box.

The flame of it flared into his face just in time for him to discover a man who was directly in front of him, and who was in the act of leaping upon him.

Instantly Nick dropped the box and the match, and, as he did so, he ducked and side-stepped; but he well knew that he was not out of the reach of the man who was in the act of making the attack upon him.

In the flash of the flame of the match he had not been able to discover more than the figure of a man. He had

seen nothing of his features, and he therefore had no idea who he might be, although the instant thought came to him that Von Bulow himself was there and that while appearing to be absent from the hotel he was all the time occupying his rooms there.

"If it is Von Bulow," was the detective's thought, "now is the time to capture him."

The reader knows something of Nick Carter's strength and ability as a wrestler; and he also knows that he had the advantage in this contest, inasmuch as he was fully dressed, while his assailant had appeared in that single flash to be only half clothed.

And yet the contest was not so unequal as might be supposed.

The detective discovered on the instant that he had grappled with no ordinary man.

The arms which encircled him were like the arms of a giant, and for a moment even all the great strength possessed by Nick Carter failed to make any impression upon or against that bearlike embrace in which he was held.

But Nick had thrown up his left arm as the other dashed upon him, and so, had secured another advantage—that of being able while he squeezed with his right arm, to force back the head of his assailant by the pressure of his forearm against his neck and chin.

Neither of the men uttered a word or a sound, save that made by their labored breathing.

Nick did not know if the other man held a weapon in either hand; he only realized that he could not then get at his own; and also that he would have refrained from using them if he could have done so.

For an interval which might have covered a minute but which seemed almost interminable to each of them, they stood there in the middle of the room in utter darkness, breathing into each other's faces. The stranger's arms were around the detective's back so that his right arm held what might be called the under hold, and his left was over the detective's shoulder. Nick's hold was with his left doubled under the chin of his assailant, and his right, like his opponent's, was under.

And it was that doubled arm under the chin of his adversary, which told. It was that which counted.

Slowly but surely that muscular left, pressing against the throttle of Von Bulow, stole his breath away and forced him backward; and presently he sank back upon the floor, almost unconscious.

It was then that the detective released his own right arm from underneath his assailant, and, raising it, he struck two tremendous blows, with all his strength against the jaw of his adversary.

That they were effective, the reader has no doubt. That Von Bulow was, in fact, not really hurt at his instant, was not in saying; and Nick Carter rose from

the fray, still silent, searched in his pocket for his box of matches, struck another light, and having discovered the location of the electric switch, turned it and so flooded the apartment with light.

"So," he said, looking down upon the half-conscious form of his antagonist; "it is Von Bulow. We are well met. It is fortunate I came here as I did."

Then he found the handcuffs which he always carried in his pockets, and having manacled the count so that there would be no possibility of his escaping, he stepped to the glass, adjusted his disguise so that it appeared as perfect as it had when he entered the hotel.

And then he calmly rang the bell which communicated with the office.

Having done that, he dragged the still limp form of Von Bulow into the bath room of the apartment, left it there and closed the door; and when the boy came in answer to the bell, he directed that the Polish gentleman, who had accosted him in the office of the hotel as he entered, be sent to him.

The boy remembered and hastened to obey the order; and when the Pole, who was one of Inspector McCluskey's most reliable men, appeared and was admitted, he found Nick Carter seated in a chair confronting a man who appeared exactly like him, save for the contusions on his face where the fist of the detective had come in violent contact with it.

"I want you to go down and rouse the manager of the hotel," said Nick, calmly. "I wish you to say to him that Nick Carter is here in possession of the rooms occupied by Count von Bulow, and that the count is my prisoner, arrested for the murder of Madame Yagarosi; and then you will call your five companions into the hotel and bring them, with the manager to this room. In the meantime, I will have concluded arrangements with this chap."

Von Bulow glared at him while he was giving the order; and when the detective from the central office had gone, he exclaimed:

"You are mistaken, Carter. I did not kill Madame Yagarosi."

"Who did?"

"Michael."

"You secured the dagger with which she was killed, from her rooms."

"Yes."

"Then you are as guilty as he is."

"I am only an instrument. I did what I was ordered to do."

"And you expect immunity? Is that the idea?"

"Yes; if I make a full confession."

"I can promise you nothing, Von Bulow."

"And yet you would save the lives of your five friends, would you not? The three assistants in your employ, the

man from the detective bureau, and the maid who was in the employ of Madame Yagarosi?"

"Oh, we will find a way to make you tell where they are," said the detective. "We have ways in our own police department, quite as mysterious as those you employ in the Third Section."

"Torture?" gasped the prisoner.

Nick shrugged his shoulders.

"If you choose to put it that way," he replied.

"Will you spare me that if I will tell you where they are?" asked the prisoner.

"Yes."

"In the apartment next to this one, then. That is where they are, and it is where they have been detained since the evening before last. In the morning they were to have been taken away. Don't ask me where, for I do not know. I am only a tool. I know something of your laws. You cannot execute me for murder; you can only imprison me for life."

"Were you in the parlor when Madame Yagarosi was killed?" asked the detective.

"Yes."

"Did you see the blow struck?"

"Yes; but I did not know it was to be struck."

"And you did nothing?"

"No; what could I do? I sat there, where I was until you came."

"But you stole the dagger?"

"Yes."

"And you delivered it—to whom?"

"To Michael."

"For what purpose?"

"It was a dagger tipped with poison. We were afraid that madame would make use of it against some of us. That is all I know."

"And you saw Michael strike her with it?"

"Yes."

Nick Carter shuddered.

"And what of Natalie?" he asked.

"Natalie—who? I know no Natalie."

"Call her Yvonne, then. What do you know of her?"

"Merely that a woman bearing such a name has been a phantom which Michael has pursued for years. I know now whom you refer to; but she has no connection whatever with our affairs."

"And Zanoni?"

"Zanoni? Yes. An angel if there ever was one."

Nick Carter shrugged his shoulders and closed the conversation. A moment later his men, accompanied by the manager of the hotel, entered the room.

* * * * *

Chick and Legrande, Patsy, Ten-Ichi and Suzanne were discovered in the adjoining apartment, as Von Bulow had described. No harm had befallen any of them.

And Prince Michael? When Nick Carter applied at the New York Hospital the following morning, he was dead.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 422, will contain "By Command of the Czar; or, Nick Carter's Boldest Defiance."

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